The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

Through **the Sacrament of Penance**, also called Confession, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can receive forgiveness from God for any and all sins. The **penitent** is the one who receives the Sacrament. The **confessor** is the priest or bishop who offers the Sacrament. When the confessor, on behalf of Christ and His Church, imparts the forgiveness of God for sin to the penitent, this is called **absolution**. When the penitent recites a prayer expressing repentance and sorrow for sin, this is called an **act of contrition**. The confessor may ask the penitent to pray, or to complete some act of self-denial or kindness, as a reparation for the harm caused by sin; this is called **penance**.

Who may go to Confession? Any baptized Catholic may go to Confession, even if he or she has not been to holy Mass in a long time. If so, inform the priest of your situation, and he will advise you further. Trust your confessor.

Who may hear Confessions? Only a validly-ordained priest or bishop can hear confessions and absolve sins through this Sacrament. You may go to any priest in any parish for confession. Deacons, nuns, monks, and laypersons can never hear confessions and can never absolve sins.

Which sins must be confessed? The penitent is obliged to confess, in kind and number, all mortal sins that the penitent can remember, after diligent examination of conscience, committed after baptism, and not yet forgiven in confession. If you have committed a particular kind of sin often, tell the confessor the kind of sin and generally how often you committed that sin. You do not need to give details about each sin, but you must include anything that makes the sin more serious. Venial sins may also be confessed.

Secrecy: It is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray a penitent in any way, in word or deed, in any manner, for any reason. Eavesdropping on confession by anyone is a mortal sin, even if the penitent is your child, spouse, relative, or friend.

Interpreter: When necessary, an interpreter may be present to assist the penitent in communicating with the confessor. The interpreter, if there is one, and all others who in any way have knowledge of sins from confession are absolutely required to observe secrecy, under pain of mortal sin.

Mortal and Venial Sin: A grave or serious sin is called a mortal sin; a less serious sin is called a venial sin. A deliberate act or intention that the sinner fully realizes is seriously wrong is an **actual mortal sin**, requiring confession to return to a state of grace before God and His Church. When a sin is objectively mortal, but the sinner did not realize it was seriously wrong, or the act was not done fully deliberately, then the sin may be less than an actual mortal sin, but should still be confessed. Venial sins may also be confessed. A seemingly minor act can be an actual mortal sin if the intention is one of utter malice, lust, hatred, or any complete rejection of goodness or truth.

Am I forgiven? If you sincerely examined your conscience in the light of Church teaching, and you confessed all the mortal sins of which you are aware, with sincere repentance from sin, you are forgiven. But if you are not **sincerely repentant**, then you are not forgiven, even if you stated all your sins and the priest said you were forgiven.

Asking Questions: the confessor may ask you brief questions pertaining to your life and your sins; answer concisely and accurately. You may ask the confessor questions pertaining to sin, confession, and the spiritual life. Confession is for confessing your sins. Do not tell long stories, or make humorous remarks, or engage in idle conversation. Only ask those questions required for your confession, repentance, and reform.

What to say during Confession:

Confessor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit….
Penitent: Bless me Father, for I have sinned. My last Confession was ____ ago. These are my sins.
[Briefly state each mortal sin and how often it was committed; you may also confess lesser sins.]
Confessor: *[he will give you a penance in the form of prayer, self-denial, or acts of kindness to others.]* …now make an Act of Contrition.
Penitent: My God, I'm sorry for having sinned against you and for having harmed my neighbor. By your grace, may I avoid sin and live in the grace and peace of your Son, with the help of the Sacraments and the holy Catholic Church. Amen.
Confessor: … I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. **Penitent:** Amen.